

By the time of his retirement in 1952, Spaulding had gained national acclaim for his work in Des Moines. His retirement ended when he took the job of librarian in his hometown of Nashua, NH.

Spaulding and his wife, Genevieve (Pierson), had two children. After his death in 1965, the Des Moines Register wrote:

“Ordinarily a community is not greatly stirred by the death of a man who has been away for 13 years, but it is different with Forrest Spaulding. He made himself so much a part of the life of Des Moines that the thought of him is still warm and pleasant.

“He went far beyond the role of librarian to help out in every cultural and intellectual phase of city activity. His interest ranged from purely city activities to foreign affairs. He was a friend of Henry A. Wallace, whose death preceded his by a few days.

“He will be remember not only for his activities but for his personality. He was a friendly, social man, with a mischievous love of a pun or humorous phrase. Among those who knew and loved these traits of his, it is as though he never left Des Moines at all.”

Information for this brochure was provided by Des Moines Public Library, and an October 22, 2005 article in the Nashua (IA) Telegraph.



Forrest Spaulding
author
Library's Bill of Rights

Forrest Spaulding's contributions to the Des Moines Public Library, the State of Iowa, and the United States combined to make him a legend in his own time.

Spaulding championed the civil rights of all Americans, spoke out against bigotry and censorship, and authored the Library Bill of Rights in 1938 in a direct challenge to the growing intolerance in the world, according to a 1947 Des Moines Register article.

Born in Nashua, NH in 1882, Spaulding attended a private academy there, followed by seminary school in Massachusetts before finding employment as a newspaper reporter in New York City. There, he attended the New York Public Library's library school, graduating in 1913. After working in libraries in New Jersey and New York, Spaulding became head of the Des Moines Public Library in 1917 at the age of 25. Before leaving Des Moines in 1919, Spaulding not only was director of the public library, but organized a library at Camp Dodge (IA) for World War I recruits, as well as military camp libraries in nearby states.

After serving as director of libraries for the federal Coast Guard, Merchant Marine and Lighthouse services, Spaulding moved to Peru in 1920 to head the country's libraries and museums. He was also a correspondent for the Associated press. He is noted as saying that his efforts to report the news from that country gave him a bitter object lesson in censorship.

Spaulding returned to head the Des Moines Public Library in 1927. His most significant contributions at the time were made in response to the crises of the Great Depression and World War II. He was acutely aware of the personal and social problems created by unemployment. In 1934, he established the Men's Reading Room in the basement of the library, which soon became known as "the waterfront university." In 1935, he sought and received funding from the federal Works Progress Administration for a variety of programs, including an all-day reading room for men that included technical and vocational, as well as recreational, reading materials.

The Great Depression also affected the Des Moines Public Library's budget. From 1935-36, a local tax limitation bill caused a 36 percent cut to the library. Book purchases were slashed, staff and salaries were cut, and branch libraries closed. Like the recessions of today, people flocked to the library. Library card

registration and circulation of books greatly increased until employment picked up.

By 1930, Spaulding had become an important member of the Iowa Library Association. He served on many committees, including Certification and Publicity, and served as president from 1936-37.

Spaulding also served in many American Library Association activities during the 1930s and 40s and was president of the Public Libraries Division of ALA. During that time, he spoke out against bigotry and censorship. In 1948, he received an award from the National Conference of Christians and Jews for his role in the struggle against racial intolerance.

In the 1940s he became an outspoken critic of censorship. A Des Moines minister protested to Spaulding that Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, should be banned at the library. Spaulding responded by saying that "if more people had read *Mein Kampf*, some of Hitler's despotism might have been prevented." He maintained that danger to the United States was not in knowing all about Hitler, but in not knowing all about him. He said that "we should fear the tendency of small minds in these days of stress."

Two years earlier, Spaulding wrote the first Library's Bill of Rights and ALA adopted it in 1939. It was ALA's response to the pressures of the book *Grapes of Wrath*. At the same time, ALA voted to establish a Committee on Censorship. In May 1940, ALA released a statement saying that "to burn or destroy a book is to destroy a part of the heritage of knowledge to which future generations are entitled." The Committee on Intellectual Freedom was formed to "safeguard the rights of library users to freedom of inquiry...in accordance with the U.S. Bill of Rights and the Library's Bill of Rights." The Library's Bill of Rights originally focused on unbiased book selection, a balanced collection and open meeting rooms.

In the 1950s, the political tone of America had changed. The paragraph in the original Library's Bill of Rights declaring that library meeting rooms should be available to all groups regardless of their beliefs was now controversial. Some librarians refused to make their rooms available for meetings of the American Communist Party. But the Library's Bill of Rights was not repudiated by ALA during the anti-Community excitement of the 1940s and 50s.